

News Release

Athletic Review Committee Releases Findings on U of M Crookston Intercollegiate Athletic Program

By Krista Lemos on Monday, November 27, 2006

CROOKSTON, MN (November 27, 2006) – An 18-member committee charged with providing a comprehensive review of the University of Minnesota Crookston (UMC) intercollegiate athletic program released its findings today, November 27, 2006, after five months of data collection and analysis.

The Athletic Review Committee report indicates that Golden Eagle athletic programs have grown over the years providing a variety of opportunities for many students, both women and men, and have attracted additional students of color to campus. The enrollment of student athletes has increased during the last ten years and today about 26% of the students are involved in athletics on campus, some 280 out of 1053 full-time students. Currently 42% of students of color on campus are student athletes.

The report also details challenges faced by the program, which has been a member of the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) Division II since 1998 and a member of the Northern Sun Intercollegiate Conference (NSIC) since 1999.

The committee, chaired by area resident and University of North Dakota (UND) Professor Glenn Olsen, Ph.D., examined all facets of athletic operations including student experiences, support systems, policies, facilities, finances, constituencies and competitiveness. This work will help identify the proper balance between academics and athletics on campus so that both not only remain viable but continue to grow. The report is online.

"The findings of the committee are comprehensive and present a more complete look at the student-athlete experience at the Crookston campus," said Olsen, who is also a UMC Teambacker member, the athletic program fundraising arm. "Intercollegiate athletics is continually evolving – conference membership changes, budget realities pose challenges – ultimately, the main objective is that the student athletes have a successful and rewarding academic and sports experience and that the University is able to support these efforts effectively.

"Thank you to everyone who participated in this process, answered questions and ensured that we were able to collect the data necessary to present the report."

In comparing support system staffing and services with other institutions in the Division II NSIC, the committee found that the Crookston campus, one of the smallest universities in the conference, has less staff and receives less funding for athletic programs that assist with retention and competitive success. Budgets and enrollment are more compatible with NCAA Division III and the National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics (NAIA) conference members.

Academic offerings at the University of Minnesota Crookston are also limited when compared to other universities regardless of conference, which can affect recruitment and retention efforts on behalf of the athletic program. The report also indicates that facility upgrades are needed, and surveys show that programs must be more competitive and successful in order to attract additional private financial support through outside fundraising efforts and to increase overall participation.

In examining the different conference affiliation options, the committee gathered data on the NAIA Dakota Athletic Conference (DAC); the NCAA Division III Upper Midwest Athletic Conference (UMAC) and the NCAA Division II NSIC. The report outlines both advantages and challenges presented with each option.

Some of the advantages listed for each conference include:

NAIA DAC advantages: possibility of being more competitive, depending on sport; similar size institutions with similar investments in operating budgets; travel distances and expenses are compatible; staffing seems to be more comparable; continued ability to offer athletic scholarships; newly established Champions of Character program provides leadership recognition opportunities for student athletes.

NCAA Division III UMAC advantages: possibility of being more competitive; similar size institutions with similar investments in operating budgets and staffing; men's hockey would have a long-term solution and all other sport programs would be viable; the NCAA provides grants and marketing strategies that can increase visibility and support recruitment efforts.

NCAA Division II NSIC advantages: membership in the NSIC and the ability to offer scholarships has increased the number of student athletes and students of color; NSIC provides conference staff, media relations, grants and marketing strategies that can increase visibility and support recruitment efforts where UMC draws a majority of students; the NCAA provides a balance between institutional controls and compliance with rules and regulations.

Chancellor Charles H. Casey will review the report, request additional details as needed and look to make some decisions regarding the future of the intercollegiate athletic program in early 2007.

"I am pleased with the energy and enthusiasm that was put into this process and look forward to reviewing the committee's findings as we strive to ensure that our athletic program continues to gain strength, supports our student athletes and enhances our mission at the Crookston campus and throughout the region," Casey said. "Athletics plays an important role in the overall student experience on campus and its continued and future success cannot happen without ongoing review and evaluation. Thank you to the committee members for all of their efforts, to Dr. Glenn Olsen for taking the lead in this endeavor and to our peer institutions for providing data and input."

The Crookston campus currently sponsors 12 Golden Eagle sports teams: football, men's and women's basketball, volleyball, women's soccer, hockey, baseball, softball, equine, men's and women's golf and women's tennis. Membership in the NSIC includes ten schools in five states: Bemidji State University, Concordia St. Paul, Northern State University, Wayne State College, Winona State University, Minnesota State University Moorhead, Upper Iowa University, Southwest Minnesota State University and University of Mary. The Golden Eagle hockey team competes in the NCAA Division III Midwest Collegiate Hockey Association (MCHA) and the equestrian team competes in the Intercollegiate Horse Show Association (IHSA).

In addition to Chair Olsen, members of the Athletic Review Committee include:

University of Minnesota Crookston: Rick Eber, admissions director and Teambacker member; Joan Ebnet, former student athlete; Stephanie Helgeson, athletic director and Teambacker executive board member; Justin Henry, former student athlete; Birman Jenkins, assistant basketball coach, former student athlete and Teambacker member; Cleon Melsa, Ph.D., assistant chemistry professor, faculty athletic representative and Teambacker member; Tricia Sanders, assistant to the vice chancellor for finance and University services and Teambacker member; Rich Stangle, Crookston Student Association president and current student athlete; Shannon Stassen, head football coach and Teambacker member; and Kari Torkelson, O.D., UMC Alumni Association president, former student athlete and Teambacker board member.

University of Minnesota: Lynn Holleran, associate to chief of staff, Office of the President

Community: Chuck Hiller, Bremer Bank and Teambacker board member; Adam Maruska, Crookston National Bank, former student athlete and Teambacker executive board member; Ed Odland, Odland, Fitzgerald & Reynolds and Teambacker executive board member; Gary Purath, regional agriculture businessman and Teambacker member; Vicki Svedarsky, retired school counselor and Teambacker member; and John Vallager, Drees, Risky & Vallager Ltd. and Teambacker member.

The University of Minnesota Crookston (UMC) delivers more than 24 different undergraduate degree programs, including online options, in agriculture; arts, humanities and social sciences; business; math, science and technology; and natural resources. UMC is dedicated to helping students and the region aim higher, reach further and dream big dreams. To learn more, visit www.UMCrookston.edu.

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